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ABSTRACT

This study explored personal feelings of Chinese fathers in Taiwan regarding the child-rearing process. Interviews with fathers of preschoolers indicated that fathers' experiences can be categorized into eight core feelings: (1) self-value (feelings of being needed and capable of being a father); (2) fulfillment (feelings that life is satisfactory and rewarding after having children); (3) intimacy (feelings of being close to their children); (4) continuity (feelings that their lives are continued by having children who resemble them); (5) worry (feelings of being bothered by the development of their children); (6) being trapped (feelings of no way out of the great responsibility); (7) tiredness (feelings of being exhausted physically and mentally); and (8) frustration (feelings of being unable to deal with children's problems). The study concluded that fathers in Taiwan no longer confine themselves to limited, traditional chores of child rearing. (Contains 19 references and 2 tables.) (EV)

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Excitement and/or frustration: Chinese Father's Experiences in Taiwan

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Abstract

Social scientific interest in fatherhood has increased in recent years. However, there has been a tendency to interpret fatherhood within limited frameworks that emphasize either father's responsibilities of sharing child-rearing tasks ,or the effects of father's involvement on child development. This study focuses on father's personal feelings involved in the child-rearing process. Chinese father's experiences in Taiwan are examined here for both their traditional and modern roles. Feelings toward the fatherhood are found abundant.

Qualitative data were gathered from two sources. The first source came from in-depth interviews with 6 Chinese fathers with preschool children. The second data source ws based upon interviewer's field notes and several panel discussions. The analyzing procedure follows Lofland & Loflands'(1984) sugg-estion, which includes developing thinking units, focusing data, developing analysis, and guiding consequences.

Data reveal that father's experiences in Taiwan can be categorized into eight core feelings. They are feelings of self-value, fulfillment, intimacy, continuity ,worry , being trapped, tiredness, and frustration. The first four feelings reflect the positive side of fatherhood, which can be seen as the rewards of being a father. The last four feelings are the costs of having a child, which are usually associated with a greater amount of sharing the child-rearing task, especially the nurturing part. We concluded that fathers in Taiwan begin to show the feminine side of parenting. Their participation in child rearing tasks is no longer limited to traditional chores. It also appears that the mothers and children play important roles on father's feelings.

Key words: fatherhood experience excitement frustration

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Excitement and/or Frustration:

Chinese Father's Experiences in Taiwan

Introduction

With the increase of the opportunity to be educated as well as the change in the job market, the incentive and need for women to step out of the family is also increasing. Moreover, the increase of nuclear family and the decrease in birth rate also change the traditional division of labor in a family. Men began to adapt to the changes of family structure, and their wives' needs to have jobs. As a result, men take part in more family activities and household affairs. Men changed under the trends of social changes, changes in family values, esteem of the role of father, and the equal rights of both sexes. We can now see the trend of men back to family and men's participation in household affairs.

Research on "married men" and "family" in recent years have been focused on the gender attitude of both men and women in family as well as the discussion of household division of labor and its impacts. Few efforts have been put on the fatherhood of married men as well as their in-depth feelings. However, the impacts faced by those fathers, though passively adapted to the changes, concern not only the psychological health of fathers, but could also influence other family members. This is certainly an issue that cannot be neglected. Is modern men considered the change in fatherhood as "no other choice?" Or will they feel proud of being fathers in new era? In the recent parenthood literature, the feelings of fathers in their fatherhood is a neglected but worthy to be esteemed issue.

Review of literature

The investigations on fatherhood have mainly laid on two parts: one is the participation and the division of labor on household affairs and child-rearing tasks for a father; the other is the impacts of father's participation on the children's development. Regrettably, father's feelings in child-rearing process have seldom been mentioned. Analyses on these three parts will be given in the following:

Father's participation in child-rearing tasks

Early western studies found mothers to be the main responsibility holders of household affairs, including child-rearing tasks (Blood &Wolfe, 1960). Though men took part in more household affairs than ever with women's participation in job markets, it seemed that they did not escape the traditional limitations on gender. Studies on double-income families pointed out that though more and more women

have full-time jobs, there was still a large gap between husbands' and their wives' division of labor on household affairs and child-rearing tasks (Pleck, 1997; Gestwicki, 1992).

A national-wide long-term data analysis conducted by Aldous, Mulligan & Bjarnason (1998) pointed out that the reason for men not able to involve in fatherhood actively was because they spent too much time on work. Once a father participated in the child-rearing tasks, this pattern will keep going. This investigation also found out that those men who were willing to transform their involvement in career to family will be more supportive to women's career.

Similar results have also been found out in recent studies conducted in Taiwan. Some investigations found out the traditional division of labor, that is "men work for bread while women keep the house," is also facing challenge (Tang, 1996; Lin, 1992; Hung, 1996). There was also an increase tendency for men to go back to family and participate in household affairs as well as child-rearing tasks (Gao; Lai, Zhaung, 1988). However, some other researchers pointed out that there was still explicit gender segregation in the participation of fatherhood. In other words, the fatherhood was merely "selective." No matter the involvement in child-rearing tasks, responsibility, mindset, the role, or the activity as well as the parental relationship, they are all out of the attitude of "being helping, and occasionally. (Wang & Yu, 1997).

Impacts of fathers' participation on Children

The other part of the literature on fatherhood focused on the impacts of fathers' participation on children or family. An American national-wide investigation conducted by Amato & Rivera (1999) confirmed that fathers' participation in normal families would reduce children's troublesome behaviors both in school and in family life. The results were the same to the white, the black and the Latino.

Besides, with the increase of divorce rate in the States, single family headed by women also increased. "Absent father" has gradually become a concern to the society. Therefore, some studies focused on the differences of recognition and behavior between children came from single families with women as the head and normal families. The study of Teachman, Day, Paasch, Carver & Call (1998) pointed out children from absent father families were more troublesome, and their math capabilities would also be inferior.

There were also some studies on the impacts of fathers' involvement on children's gender identity and development. For example, Wang's research pointed out that fathers' involvement could not only enhance the sound development of children's gender identity and the cultivation of value from parental interaction, but also the

enlightenment of intelligence as well as the adaptation of personal relationship. The more the fathers' involvement on fatherhood, and the better the performance on child-rearing tasks, the less the gender stereotype would be hold by the children (Lin, 1992).

The feelings of fathers' involvement

In the review of the past literature, the researcher found out that the discussions on the fathers' roles of married men were mostly from social aspects, family needs, and their influences on children and spouses. Few had mentioned their own points of view on fatherhood and their feelings.

In an interview project of six families conducted by Wang and Yu (1997), they had a preliminary investigation on the feelings of being father for the first time. They found out that the process of participation in child-rearing tasks were mixed with bitterness and happiness. The bitter part was not due to the direct care-taking or the interaction experiences, rather it was due to have no alternative as a career man; while the happiness came from joyfulness and satisfaction as well as the growth in stability and responsibility in character.

The research done by Wang and Yu (1997) appears to be the only literature on the feelings of fathers in modern Taiwan. Does this mean that there are still some fathers' voices haven't been heard by the public? And there are also some thoughts and viewpoints haven't been discovered? Some researchers pointed out that males were also the sacrifices of traditional patriarchism. However, their weakness was indirect and not easily to be detected. The traditional social structure as well as the division of labor in household affairs made quite a few males to feel sorry and lost. These losses even could have the males become dependent population in families (Mo & Wang, 1996). The book written by Huang (1989) also pointed out that married men involved in household affairs and child-rearing tasks in modern society faced pressure from colleagues, friends, neighbors, and even their own parents. It then can be easily seen that traditional values were not so easy to be changed. "There are differences between men and women" is still a chain limits the space for woman development but also limits men's viewpoints on career development and division of household labor (Wang, 1997). Therefore, the responsibilities shouldered by modern fathers might be more than what we saw, and the pressures they had might also be greater than we suspected.

It is our intention to investigate the following questions: 1. What are the significances of the birth of a child to a modern father? 2. Is fatherhood filled with excitement or frustration?

Methodology

This research is qualitative. The interviewees' personal feelings and subjective affections were to be captured through the in-depth fatherhood interviews. Though there might be some distortions of truth due to the interaction between the interviewers and the interviewees, the research has tried her best to make clear factors might affect the results so that the standpoints as well as viewpoints of this study could be easily understood by readers.

Subject

Subjects of this research are set to be "married man with preschool children." The reason is preschool children need more cares. In addition to emotional support and companion, preschool children also need some one to do food preparation, bath taking and other trivialities as well as teaching ad supervision. So parenthood could be more easily seen from preschool children.

Once the subject being set, the researcher asked help of a mid-sized kindergarten with 207 children in Taipei County to call for volunteers of fathers with preschool fathers to receive interviews. Teachers in the kindergarten also helped to invite volunteers. 6 volunteers were recruited.

The ages of the volunteers were between thirties and forties. The education statuses of those volunteers and their spouses were mainly bachelors and masters. There was only one volunteer and his spouse was graduated from senior high school. They all had at least two children. For details, see Table I.

Code	Age	No. Of Children	Ages of each Child	Occupation	Status of Education	Spouse's status of education
001M	38	3	8、3、3	Owner of an eyeglasses shop	BA	BA
002M	33	2	5、3	Director in an extensive class	MA	BA
003M	35	2	6、4	Vice manager in an electronic company	MA	BA
004M	36	3	8、6、4	Professor in a university	DR	DR
005M	40	4	14、10、8、3	Hardware shop owner	senior high school	senior high school
006M	36	2	6、5	Toothbrush factory owner	senior high school	senior high school

Table I: Sample Characteristics

Interview Process

Two researchers accompanied each other to conduct the interviews. During each interview, the interview outline and the extended sub-titles were used for references for the initiation and interruption of a conversation as well as the exploration of the environment. In the beginning, personal profiles were asked to establish a good rapport, then information about daily events (including parental division of child-rearing and household affairs, interaction and involvement in parental education) were gathered, and also their feelings in fatherhood. All interviews were audiotape recorded. Field notes were also taken.

Maybe due to traditionally Chinese men were not used to express themselves and not used to talk about feelings, fathers seemed to be cooperative in the first stage when answering basic data and describing daily events, yet became not so willing to discuss the feelings and viewpoints by replying "don't-knows." One father even told us that it was no use to think so much. It was all but natural. Otherwise, why bother to have children? The situation doubles the difficulty for the researchers to capture the subjective feelings of the interviewees. In addition to the explicit statement in dialogue, the researchers also have to observe the interviewees' body language, the facial expressions, as well as the tone for the

auxiliary analysis.

Data analysis

Audio-tapes were transcribed verbatim. The contents were then compared to the external behaviors to have the feelings of their participations in fatherhood. During the process, the two interviewers discussed the contents after each interview. Several meetings were held to discuss the significances of the contents.

After discussion, the results were submitted to three experts to have their subjections on the concepts raised by the researchers and to have in-depth discussion with the researchers individually. Afterwards, the data were categorized and refined compared to interview data and current literature. And then, some sub-categorizations were separated for detailed discussion. The analyzing procedure follows Lofland & Loflands'(1984) suggestion, which includes developing thinking units, focusing data, developing analysis, and guiding consequences.

Results

The feelings in fatherhood are analyzed in the following: self-value, fulfillment, intimacy, continuity, worry, being trapped, tiredness, and frustration. Definitions of these 8 feelings are listed in Table II.

Table II Feelings in fatherhood

Feeling	Definition	Example
Self-value	Feelings of being needed, and capable of being a father	" I am proud to say that I involved the whole process. I am a complete father! I began at the very beginning when my wife was still in confinement. " (004M)
Fulfillment	Feelings of that life is satisfactory and rewarding after having children	"In fact, you organized a family. It just liked that you with your family members when you were a child. You accepted the way your family was. It was not so bad at all. " (001M)
Intimacy	Feelings of being closer to their children than before	"Of course, they were close to their mother at home. But when I was at home, they came to me. " (001M) "They (the kids) were with us. We played a lot together. We made fun of each other quite often" (006M).
Continuity	Feelings of that their lives are continued by having children resembles them.	"The eldest is more independent in character. The second one is more dependent… Actually, I feel the eldest is more like me in character. " (003M)
Worry	Feelings of being bothered by the development of their children	"My wife told me: "Can you be at ease with the extensive class? Can you be at ease?" Actually, we were afraid that he might become a bad boy. So we felt that we better drive him to school " . (005M)
Being trapped	Feelings of no way out due to a great responsibility	"Sometimes, how should I say … You simply cannot think too much! If you do think so much you will feel the burden is very…, really." (001M)
Tiredness	Feelings of being exhausted both physically and mentally	" After having the first baby, we were afraid that if we were capable of bring him up well enough. We felt so tired. Actually, the most tiring days were the very beginning when Mother took care of the baby in her confinement. Our life lost the original order " … (004M)
Frustration	Feelings of being unable to deal with children's problems	"Kids think of their mother more naturally. They asked mother to bring them home…When I arrived, they asked me: Why not Mom?" I told them because Mom was busy. So she couldn't be here. So, I was here for you. " (002M)

Self-value

Self-value is one's basic attitudes and feelings towards oneself. The self-value of a father means he feels that the kids and family need him. He feels that he is important to the kids' life. He is also capable of dealing with the kids. He can satisfy the kids' needs or is capable to handle unexpected situations.

Speaking of the second and the third kid, I am proud to say that I involved the whole process. I am a complete father! I began at the very beginning when my wife was still in confinement. (004M)
I bathed the baby even though sometimes I came back late. (Laughter). I bathed the child that time when the kid was still very little. I took it easy. It was not so difficult (001M)

The above two interviewees mentioned that they involved in child-rearing tasks. The joyfulness and satisfaction from the involvement of kids' growing can be seen from the tone and language. They knew that they could handle the kids' daily needs independently. They felt that they were capable. And they meant somebody in their kids' minds. Some interviewees mentioned that when kids had trouble, they would come to them (002M). The other mentioned that father was just like the Santa Claus, who brought hope to life (003M). The interviewees felt satisfied and recognized about this. This also showed that father's importance in the kids' minds. Father is the one to provide help, laughter, companion, and learning.

Fulfillment

Huang (1989) mentioned that modern men, unlike the traditional men, did not feel that career was the most important thing in life. More and more men believed that family was the origin of their satisfaction. They were willing to spend more time with kids. Chou(1995) pointed in her translation that the decision to have kid made a man, to grow in one evening.

The changes after marriage and having kids for a modern man were then to be seen. The goals of life changed after the birth of kids. The attitudes towards life and the characters became more substantial. They experienced more feelings in life. They felt that life was filled with joy and happiness. They felt life is satisfactory and rewarding seeing the kids. The interviewees of this project also expressed similar feelings.

In fact, you organized a family. It just liked that you with your family members when you were a child. You accepted the way your family was. It was not so bad at all. (001M)
Man did not complete his life. So you could understand how you grew up by taking care of kids. (004M)

001M spoke of routines after having kids very naturally. He also expressed his feelings towards "home", and the feelings of certainty being together. 004M mentioned about the feelings, growing, learning, and the completion of life after having kids. We could not hear the real feelings of having kids from his language. However, he was always smiling in the process of interview. So, we could

experience the satisfaction, fulfillment and happiness in life together with him.

Intimacy

In our interviews, we found out that the relationship between fathers of younger generation and their kids was closer than before. Fathers would describe the happy hours with kids in simple language. Some fathers looked happy when speaking of the interaction with kids. Some had warm appearance in their faces.

> *Of course, they were close to their mother at home. But when I was at home, they came to me. This was because that I spent less time at home. (001M)*
>
> *They (the kids) were with us. We played a lot together. We made fun of each other quite often (006M).*

However, fathers were not used to speak loud of their love, appreciation and care of their kids. They would not express the feelings with kids. They would not say that what they understood from the intimacy. Yet, didn't they have these feelings in mind? Didn't they have all kinds of feeling and emotions when dealing with kids? Didn't they like to play and laugh with the kids? Not necessarily. It was because that they were not used to express their feelings.

Continuity

Continuity means that the birth of a child will let the parents feel their lives to be continued. They felt that the kids looked so like themselves. The kids were just parts of themselves. This is a feeling of "from myself." The new life came from me. There was also a pride and satisfactory of "this is my child."

Fathers' sense of continuity was expressed mostly in their analyses of the characters of different kids. For example: 003M's face and eyes did have glamour when speaking of the time with kids. There was joyfulness, love, appreciation, etc. These expressions seemed to say "he is my child." He was so proud of and satisfied with his own child.

> *The eldest is more close to Father. The second one is close to Mother. The eldest is more independent in character. The second one is more dependent... Actually, I feel the eldest is more like me in character. The second one is more like his mother... So the two are so close, (laughter)... (003M)*

Worry

We can always hear the word of "worry" from parents. This phenomenon makes us understand that this feeling hasn't been reduced with time. It was always in

parents' minds. After having kids, parents were naturally worried about kids continuously. They were worried about their kids' development and existence in society. They were afraid of losing the kids out of no reason at all. They felt guilty for didn't take good care of the kids. They felt sorrow for kids' poor performances. They even did not know how to teach kids. All possible problems a kid would encounter in the process of growing were being considered. Fathers' worries seemed to be no less than those felt by mothers'.

> *I worry about their safety. So, I will hold the kids' hands when walking in a corridor, or on road, etc. (001M)*
>
> *My wife told me: "Can you be at ease with the extensive class? Can you be at ease?" Actually, we were afraid that he might become a bad boy. So we felt that we better drive him to school. (005M)*

Being trapped

The birth of a child is not only an addition in role played by parents, but also a responsibility. There are so many affairs concerning the kids, one after another. All of them add up to be a great responsibility and pressure in child-rearing process. Sometimes, these responsibilities and pressures form a feeling of being trapped. The sacrifice was made out of obligation. A man had to shoulder such responsibilities after being a father. Sometimes, they are heavy. The other times, they became barrier to better development. Fathers even would feel impotent in dealing with the kids. This is so-called the feeling of being trapped.

003M spoke of his foreign business trip made him unable to accompany the kids. There was no balance between career and family. There was no other alternative for him.

> *I had no other choice. I had to go abroad. The longest trip may take two weeks. Not really so bad. They still recognized me when I came back. Yet, sometimes, the pressure of work was so great... I really got no other alternative, no choice... (003M)*

001M was in a low profile when spoke of financial load. He felt that there must be worry, pressure, and responsibility. But one simply cannot think too much. On the one hand, he thought that he could accommodate to the situations after some adaptation, so the sense of anxiety was not so strong; on the other hand, he believed that anxiety could not solve problems, so one had better not to even think of them.

> *Sometimes, how should I say ... You simply cannot think too much! If you do think so much you will feel the burden is very..., really. (Laughter) Like mother, of course, she thinks. But the other time you consider yourselves to have to be responsible. You don't have to think.*

Save the trouble! (001M)

Tiredness

Tiredness means a father will encounter so many expectations in daily life after the birth of a child. The pace of life is changed. Fathers feel exhausted both spiritually and physically. Things are not easily to be handled. Fathers feel really torn out. The tiredness does not mean the burden in career though.

> *Err... I took care in the first stage. Sometimes, I... She was in high spirits. She didn't want to go to bed. I didn't sleep for the child. So what could I do! I was always lack of sleep at that time (003M)*

After having the first baby, we were afraid that if we were capable of bring him up well enough. We felt so tired. Actually, the most tiring days were the very beginning when Mother took care of the baby in her confinement. Our life lost the original order... (004M)

It was easy for fathers to feel the tiredness in child-rearing process. On the one hand, father began to take part in child-rearing affairs. On the other hand, they could understand their spouses' feelings in child-rearing process.

Frustration

Due to traditional thinking, women of many families did not encourage the men in their household to take part in child-rearing tasks (Cordes, 1983).Under the influences of the said myth, men seldom participated in child-rearing tasks, and the establishment of parental relationship. Moreover, men were taken as more dominating, and with bad temper. So often, it was men to give punishment. Children therefore dared not to get close to fathers. Even now, there were more and more fathers involved in child-rearing tasks, the phenomenon of "male were the weaker party in a family" (Wang, 1997) was still existing. Men more often than not felt unable to deal with children's problems. They often felt frustrated.

> *Kids think of their mother more naturally. They asked mother to bring them home. I told them I got no other choice. I said yes. When I arrived, they asked me: "Why not Mom?" I told them because Mom was busy. So she couldn't be here. So, I was here for you." (002M)*

002M mentioned that the kids liked their mother to take them home. They didn't like their father to do so. There was a feeling of frustration when he spoke of this. He was greatly troubled by the kids' feelings. He couldn't accept this. And he couldn't think of a solution. He wanted to escape and leave the problem to his spouse.

005M spoke of his bad temper. He scored his kids quite often. So his relation

with the kids was not so stable. He was in low mood sometimes.

> *Sometimes, I was angry. Sometimes, I felt I was under pressure. Of course, this was natural. So, If the kids had troubles in school or in manners, then I would score them bitterly... (005M)*

Conclusion

What does the birth of a child mean to a father? What are the feelings a father has during the child-rearing process? The researchers employed in-depth interviews to understand the feelings in fatherhood. Eight core feelings were analyzed to show that there are bitterness and happiness in the child-rearing process for modern fathers. For example: self-value of feeling being needed by the kids; fulfillment of life goals after the birth of a kid so that one can settle down; pride of intimacy with the kids; confident of continuity for the kids look so like oneself; worry about the dangers in the kids' daily life; being trapped by obligations; tiredness for being busy all the time; and finally, sense of frustration due to unable to control everything.

From the descriptions given by fathers, the researchers found out that those fathers were unlike the traditional fathers, who were merely bread earners with tough images. We found warmth in them. Modern fathers seem to want to be close to the kids. They were proud of their kids. However, during the child-rearing process, modern fathers also experience worries, tiredness, frustration and feelings of being trapped by their father roles.

Implication and future directions

The present study provides a basic structure for the understanding of the feelings in fatherhood of Chinese married men. It not only echoes with the "men back to family" trend , but also moves beyond the division-of-labor issue in fatherhood research. For early childhood educatiors and family practitionors, understanding father's feelings in the parenting process would enhance their ability to do parent education, and provide information about the care of children as well as other family members.

However, due to the sample and the explorative nature of the study, the results gained should be seen as tentative. The researchers propose to investigate the following topics in the future:

The present study offers some general descriptions on the feelings in fatherhood, which can be continued in future studies, such as quantitative study to verify the points.

The present study employs fathers with preschool children as subjects, father in different family life cycles can be considered in the future. And both

fathers and mothers can also be interviewed for cross-reference or comparison.

The present study does not categorize families of dual career and single career. This condition may be taken into consideration in future design to control the basic variables and to find the differences between the two groups.

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